BUILDERS OF MODERN INDIA

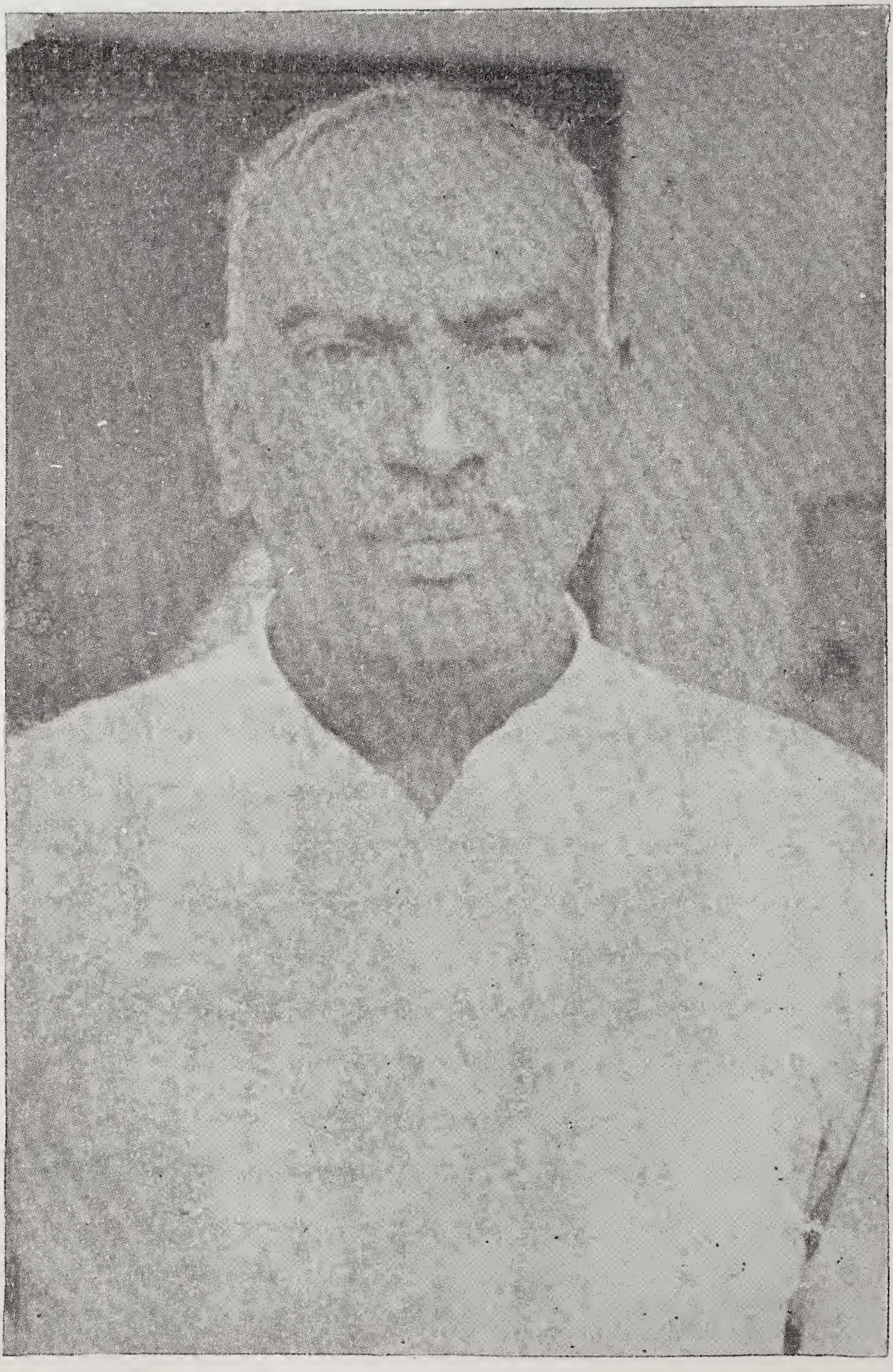
K. KAMARAJ

R. PARTHASARATHI

PUBLICATIONS DIVISION


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PUBLICATIONS DIVISION
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

When I was asked to write the biography of Kamaraj, I gladly accepted the assignment. My association with Kamaraj dates back to the later twenties. We went to Calcutta as delegates to the Indian National Congress and I still remeber our walk through Chouringhee when we went sight-seeing. Later I used to meet him at Shri Satyamurti's residence. When he shifted to Madras, I was meeting him at the Madras Distric Congress Committeee office, which was located in a lane behind Roundtana. In the thirties, I had just joined All India Radio. The Madras Station of Air was opened in June 1938 and I was one of the first batch of programme staff. Rajaji who was then "Prime Minister" (as the Chief Minister was thus designated during those days) inaugurated the Madras Station. I was in charge of Talks and Dramas. All the the eminent persons including Congress leaders like Satyamurti, came to broadcast—of course on non-political subjects. I approached Kamaraj with the request to broadcast a talk. He was first un-willing, but later was persuaded to. Years later, in 1949 I was taken on deputation, as Director of Information and Publicity, in Madaras Government. Sri Kumaraswamy Raja was then Chief Minister. Kamaraj became Chief Minister in April 1954 and I had the privilege of continuing as Director of Information and Publicity during his Chief Ministership. Some of his friends tried to poison his mind against me and tired to persuade him to shift me form the post of Director of Information and Publicity. He stood firm and told them to mind their business. This showed how he was impervious to outside influence and how fair and just he was to the officers and services. In 1956, when the Madras Government constituted a separate Department of Khadi, I was offered the Directorship of the new Department. I was a little taken a back and had my own misgivings as I was led to think that it was a

clever move to shift me form the Information and Publictiy Department. I went to Kamaraj and asked him why I was being shifted to another department and if he was not safisfied with my work as Director of Information an Publicity. Pat came his reply: "If it were so" (if my work was not found satisfactory) "I would have told you frankly. It is not at all so. When your name was suggested for the post of Director of Khadi, I readily agreed, becasue I thought there was no other person more suitable than you; for, you have a genuine faith in Khadi and being a new Department it would give you a better opportunity to show your worth. Have no misgivings or hesitation. Take it up, I tell you". I accepted it, on this assurance, and I have not regretted it; for, really I could actively do something by way of genuine service in a work which was to my liking. During his Chief Ministership, I never approached him for any personal favours, nor did he ever use his position to show favours even to his intimate friends. This sterling quality placed him above all personal prejudices or predilections. In alter years—especially during his last years, he maintained the same cordial relations with friends.

During the last few months before his death I was one of those who used to visit him and spend some time with him, as he was lonely; other friends also used to visit him and he never refused to see any one.

I was not able to pay my daily visits for two or three days before his death on the 2nd October, 1975 which was Gandhi Jayanti Day. I decided to go and see him in the afternoon next day. I started at about 3 p m. from my house and I found some worders going through the streets shouting "Kamaraj is dead". I was shocked. I could not believe my ears. I immediately rushed to his residence at Tirumalai Pillai Road In Tyagarayanagar. I was told there that his body had been taken to Rajaji Hall as the crowds could not be managed at his residence. I then rushed to Rajaji Hall, where the body was lying in state. All round the Hall and in the open grounds of Government Estate, it was a sea of milling crowds pouring in to pay their last respect. It was a moving and heart-

rending sight. People of all ages and pursuations, men and women, young and old, wailing and shedding tears showed their unbounded affection for their beloved leader. I was just a speck in that human ocean.

To me, as to thousands of others, it was a personal bereavement.

I offer this humble homage of his biography to a great beloved friend.

There may be some commissions in this, but I hope the readers will not mind them but take it in the spirit in which it is offered.

Madras,

6-10-80 R. PARTHASARTHY

On Public demand a reprint of this book is being reproduced.

—Director

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I

DAWN OF A SUN

THE DISTRICT of Ramanathapuram in the southern tip of the Indian peninsula, in Tamil Nadu, is well known for its cotton and tobacco. Sparsely populated, this district is also well known by its leading community, the Nadars. The Nadars are staunch Hindus and claimed to be Kshatriyas-Nadalwars (rulers of the land)— which in a way was true, Gradually, some of the leaders of the community took to business and trade and, by virtue of this profession, rose up a step higher. They themselves looked down upon certain other communities as untouchable. But they always showed respect to the higher communities and it is said that when they happened to walk on the streets where the higher communities lived, they used to take off their upper cloth and tie it round the waist; and they took off their chappals and carried them in their hands as a mark of respect. In course of time, this order of things changed. (Some of the Nadars took to trade and business and gradually their social status became upgraded). Soon they became a dominant community in the district and commanded the respect and status of the higher communities.

Virudupatti—the trade centre of the district grew from a small township to a "Nagar"—city.

Among the Nadars themselves, there were five or six subjects—according to their different avocations. Among them two were prominent—the Nattanmaikarars—the rulers of the land the Meghavarnam clan—the "cloud coloured" clan. There was free social intercourse between these groups and intermarriages were common. Nattanmaikarar Sulochana Nadar gave his sister Parvati Ammal in marriage to Chinappa Nadar, who belonged to the

Meghavarnam clan. Parvati Ammal had two children, who died early. She then took in adoption one Kumaraswamy from her husband's clan. Sulochana Nadar had two sons—Karuppiah and Kasinarayanan—and a daughter Sivakami. Following their tradition, Sivakami was married to Kumaraswamy, Kumaraswamy was running a coconut shop.

For a long time the couple had no issues and they prayed to Kamatchi Amman, their family deity, to bless them with a male issue. A son was born to them on July 15th 1903; and in gratitude and reverence to the deity, they named the boy Kamatchi. The boy was however, called affectionately by the mother as "Raja". The boy's name was then changed to Kamaraj, as Kamatchi is a feminine name. Two years later a girl was born to the couple and she was name Nagammal. Kamaraj was, by nature, retired, shy and soft-spoken. In fact he spoke very little unlike the boys of his age and until the end he maintained his quietness. He was a man of a few words and this distinguished him form others, even in later years.

Kamaraj was put to school at the early age of five. His first teacher was one Velayudam. It would have been more appropriate if he had been called Kolayudam, for he was one of those traditional teachers who did not believe in sparing the rod and many a boy had tasted the sting of his birch-rod. Kamaraj learnt the alphabet and arithmetic from this teacher. But the teacher's harsh methods upset Kamaraj and his parents; so he was withdrawn from this school and put in another, Nayanar Vidyalaya, an elementary school. Here he learnt to read and write Tamil. He was then sent to the Kshatriya Vidyalaya-the only high school in Virudupatti. The school was started by the community to give free eduction and each family contributed a handful of rice everyday for its upkeep. It was known as "pidi arisi" (handful of rice) school. Later the school was maintained by the "Mahimai" contributions raised by the community for such purposes. Curiously enough, the free elementary education, which Kamaraj introduced in the State during his Chief Ministership, originated form his birthplace.

Within a year after he joined the High School, calamity befell the family. Kamaraj's father had just built up a flourishing wholesale business. One day when he returned home from the shop he complained of chest pain and he collapsed the next day. It was a severe blow to Kamaraj's mother, who was let with her two young children—Kamaraj and his sister. Her mother-in-law, who was widowed a few months earlier, had also to be looked after. Kamaraj had an uncle, Karuppiah Nadar, who was running a cloth shop in Virudhupatti. He was the only male member to help Sivakami Ammal. He sold Sivakami Ammal's jewels and invested the money, so that a regular income could be got to maintain the family. All hopes were now centred round Kamaraj and his uncle and mother hoped he would complete his school education and help his uncle in his business to earn enough to support the family.

Kamaraj evinced little interest in his education and played a truant. He also did not push himself forward like the other boys. An instance of this may be cited to show his character. For Vinayaka Chaturti celebration in his school the boys were asked to contribute each about half an anna. When, after the puja, the "Prasadam" (fried rice) was being distributed, as usual, there was clamour and rush among the boys to get their share. Kamaraj quietly stood aloof until rush was over and then he went to receive the *Prasadam.* Very little was left for him. When he went home with it, his grandmother asked why he got so little. Kamaraj said that he did not want to rush with others.

This same attitude was evident throughout his life. He never pushed himself forward, but he preferred to remain in the background. It was the same attitude when he became the President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, the Chief Minister and the Congress President. All these honours came to him unsought for by him.

II

POLITICAL BACK-DROP

KAMARAJ ENTERED Politics by sheer adventitious circumstance. His interest in politics was roused quite early in his life. When Gandhiji started his non-cooperation movement in 1921-22, Kamaraj was a mere boy. He used to attend some of the meetings held in Virudhunagar. He first heard Satyamurti in the twenties and was inspired by his fiery oratory. Even when he was working with his uncle in the latter's shop, he was drawn by the spell of Gandhiji. He heard about the Jallianwalabagh tragedy, which sent a shock and resentment throughout the country. Gandhiji, Satyamurti and other leaders had raised their voice of protest. In young Kamaraj's life this was the turning point. His young blood was up, and so his spirits. He joined the Congress as a volunteer and for a few years he was content to be a volunteer and worker. His mother did not like his mixing up in politics, nor did his uncle. Thinking that a change might do him good, his uncle and mother sent him to Trivandrum where another uncle of his had timber depot. But there also he interested himself in political activities. In Vaikom, near Trivandrum, the Thivas and Ezhvas were forbidden to use the road leading to the temple. A satyagraha against this was launched by the local leaders. Kamaraj joined the satyagraha, but he was not arrested. The Travancore Maharaja ultimately yielded and gave the Thivas and Ezhvas the right to use the road.

Kamaraj took up work as an insurance agent, but his mind was not absorbed in it. After some months he gave up his insurance work and plunged himself in Congress work. His uncle and mother though that if he got married, he would become more responsible. So they fixed up a match for him, a relation of his. Kamaraj refused

to marry. He resolved to remain a bachelor until freedom was achieved. His mother and uncle were sorely disappointed and vexed. Even after the achievement of freedom, he remained a bachelor till the end. Till her death it was a lasting vexation for his mother. Even late in life, his mother was never tired of advising him to marry. Ultimately she gave it up and became reconciled herself to his being a bachelor. In fact, throughout his life, Kamaraj had no thoughts of marriage. Two of his closest friends, Dhanushkodi Nadar and Muthuswamy Achari, likewise took a vow not to marry till freedom was won. Muthuswamy later got married after freedom was achieved but Dhanushkodi Nadar remained a bachelor. Dhanushkodi Nadar was a very devoted friend of Kamaraj and he helped him in many ways till the end.

III

ENTER FREEDOM STRUGGLE

THE CLARION CALL of Mahatma Gandhi, for non-violent non-cooperation as a mass movement for achieving freedom, drew Kamaraj, like several other young and old men, to jump into the fray. Mahatma Gandhi laid stress on what he called the "Constructive Programme" of propaganda for Khadi, Prohibition, removal of untouchability and communal harmony. Kamaraj became active in propagating the constructive programme. While other Congress men had swayed in later years about the constructive programme — S. Srinivasa Aiyangar and others called it a socio-economic programme, not effective for fighting on the political field, Kamaraj's faith remained unshaken. What really appealed to him was that the constructive programme was for the benefit of the poor villagers who were ruined by evil of drink and who economic condition was pitiable; the Khadi and Village industries programme afforded relief to them by was of solving the unemployment and under-employment problem in the villages. Kamaraj was a staunch advocate of Khadi and he remained so throughout his life. The Nadar community especially the rich merchants looked upon the Congress with disdain and they were pro-British. Kamaraj's faith remained unshaken. What really appealed to him was that the constructive programme was for the benefit of the poor villager who were ruined by evil of drink and whose economic condition was pitiable; the Khadi an Village industries programme afforded relief to them by way of solving the unemployment and underemployment problem in the villages. Kamaraj was a staunch advocate of Khadi and he remained so throughout his life. The Nadar community especially the rich merchants looked upon the Congress with disdain and they were

pro-British. Kamaraj had the Herculean task of raising funds for the Congress — in the face of apathy and even open hostility of Nadar merchants. Undaunted, Kamaraj hit upon the plan of collection through hundis through volunteers sent to the railway station and other public places.

Kamaraj organised public meetings which were addressed by prominent leaders like Dr.P.Varadarajulu Naidu (an old veteran), Satyamurti and others. The opponents, mainly Justice party men, attempted to disturb and break-up these meetings. But Kamaraj with his well-organised and disciplined band of loyal young volunteers managed to keep order in the meetings. He had the makings of a veteran organiser, and his capability was proved amply later on many occasions, one such being Satyamurti's hectic tour in Tamil Nadu. The Justice Party, came to power in the province finally.

Kamaraj was free from any communal bias. He was far above petty things. He always looked form the national angle. To him, the nation, the people and the Congress were his God and to them he dedicated himself fully and entirely. He was least tainted by communal feelings.

In 1930 Gandhiji launched the Salt Satyagraha movement, and marched to Dandi to break the Salt Law. In Tamil Nadu Rajaji, with a band of chosen volunteers marched form Tiruchi to Vedaranyam in Thanjavur District to break the Salt Law. Kamaraj offered Satyagraha in his own district and was arrested and sentenced to two years imprisonment. This was the beginning of his jail career.

On hearing of his arrest and imprisonment, his grandmother, Parvati Ammal, who was very much attached to him, was shocked and her health shattered. Her condition became worse and her grand-nephew Doraiswamy Nadar, managed to get an order from the Madras Government, letting Kamaraj out on parole for fifteen days to enable him to see his ailing grandmother. Kamaraj was informed of his grandmother's critical condition and was told she wanted to see him before she died. Kamaraj however, refused to

come out on parole on the conditions of assurance of 'good behaviour' by him. Doraiswamy Nadar was very disappointed. But luckily, Kamaraj was released along with other politicals under the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. Virudunagar gave him a hero's welcome. He was just in time to see his grandmother before her death.

The huge surging crowd gave him a tumultuous welcome. He was asked to address them. He was so over-whelmed that he could not find words to express his feelings. However, in his very characteristic simple and straight manner he asked them to pray Almighty that their affection and regard for him should not turn his head and make him proud. This was typical of his humility.

Gandhiji returned form London after attending the second Round-Table Conference in 1931, a sad and disappointed man, as the Indian leaders and the British Government failed to come to an agreement. Gandhiji and other leaders were arrested. Lord Willingdon, the Viceroy, unleashed a spate of repressive measures, then followed a spate of arrests and imprisonment of nation leaders.

Though Kamaraj did not do anything in violation of prohibitory orders, security proceedings were taken against him and due to his refusal to furnish security, he was put in jail again. While in jail, Kamaraj and another Congress worker Arunachalam were tried to be implicated in the Madras Conspiracy Case. Actually, Arunachalam purchased a revolver from the money he got form Kamaraj. Though Kamaraj was sympathetic towards the young revolutionaries, he did not associate himself with their methods or activities. He was a loyal Congressman and pledged to Gandhiji's creed of non-violence.

The police tried to foist another case Kamaraj and his associates when some country-made bombs were found in Virudunagar Post Office and Srivilliputtur Police Station. George Joseph, an eminent barrister form Madras and staunch nationalist, defended their case and consequently they were acquitted.

IV

THE GURU AND SISHYA

GANDHIJI'S SATYAGRAHA movement was withdrawn (in pursuance of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact) and the Congress accepted the proposal to contest elections under the new Reforms Act. Satyamurti, who spearheaded the council entry movement, was elected President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee in 1936, launched the election campaign. The Herculean task of organising the campaign in Tamil Nadu fell on Kamaraj's shoulders. Unlike his Guru, Kamaraj did not use the platform as the main campaign forum; on the other hand, he strengthened the hands of Satyamurti by effectively marshalling young workers at the grass-root level. He was elected secretary of the Tamil Nadu Congress committee, Satyamurti had been earlier elected to Central Assembly.

Now it was widely expected and hoped he would take over the leadership of Congress Party in Madras Assembly. He was to contest from the University Constituency from Madras. The Andhra Congressmen, under the leadership of T. Prakasam, did not like to have Satyamurti's leadership. If there had been a contest for leadership it was feared the Andhras would put up Prakasam against Satyamurti and the chances would have been even. At this stage, some well-meaning persons like K. Srinivasan, Managing Editor of the Hindu tried to work for an unanimous choice of the leader. C. Rajagopalachariar, who had announced his retirement from politics and resigned his Congress membership was approached and requested to agree to take up the leadership. He was, however, reluctant and after some persuasion he agreed to take up the leadership of the Congress Party in the legislature, on condition that he was not required to campaign and canvass, as he said his health did not permit it. He would agree to an unanimous election.

It was then suggested he might get elected from the University constituency. Rajaji pointed out that Satyamurti was intending to contest from the constituency. Actually Satyamurti wanted to come to his own province and take up the leadership. Srinivasan invited Satyamurti to his house to talk it over. Srinivasan explained to him that in the circumstance prevailing then in Madras, there was a contest, the Andhra leader, Prakasam would have a very fair chance of winning. So, it was desirable to have a leader acceptable to both sides. "Where is such a leader?" Asked Satyamurti. Then Srinivasan told him if Rajaji was put up, he would be acceptable to both sides. "But Rajaji has retired. Would he be agreeable to come back" asked Satyamurti. "Yes, he is agreeable" said Srinivasan. "Did he say that?" Asked Satyamurti, "Yes" said Srinivasan. "But he has to be elected as a member of Assembly. Is he thinking of standing for election?" "Yes" said Srinivasan "provided he does not has to contest in a general constituency as his health will not permit his active campaigning", "Then how can he be elected? From which constituency?" Asked Satyamurti. "From the University constituency provided you are willing to give it to him" was Srinivasan's reply. The University constituency was more or less a pocket borough of Satyamurti. Srinivasan added, "Since you are in the Central assembly, you can give your University seat in the Provincial Assembly to him". Satyamurti said, "OH! I shall be very happy to do it.; but just let us be sure C.R is willing."

"You can get the assurance from him directly right now, he is here and you may ask him", assured Srinivasan. C.R. who was all alone in an adjoining room came out, smiling. Satyamurti was surprised, if not shocked. He began to suspect. He got over his first shock without the least show of regret or, vexation, natural under such circumstance. He assumed a cheerful attitude; it was agreed that C.R. should stand form the University constituency. Though C.R. did not go about personally meeting the voters (as Satyamurti would have done), he issued an appeal to the graduates, Satyamurti joined in the appeal. C.R. was elected with a thumping majority while his opponent, a young barrister, lost his deposit.

But Satyamurti still has hopes of coming back to Madras and expected to be invited to join Rajaji's ministry. He was hoping and expecting that Rajaji would repay his kindness by including him in his ministry; he was sure he would be elected from some other constituency. With such hope and expectation he left for Delhi, via Bombay, to attend the Central Assembly. It was on the way to Delhi that he learnt Rajaji has formed the ministry and he has taken one of his trusted followers, Dr. T.S.S. Rajan of Trichy, as a minister, after nominating him to the Council. It was a shock to Satyamurti, even more to Kamaraj. Sardar Patel who had been posted with development wrote to Satyamurti in his characteristic manner: "It is a blessing in disguise — I was wondering what I would have done without you and Bhulabhai in the Central assembly. What is a loss to Madras is gain to the nation". In fact it was believed by some critics of Rajaji that he manoeuvred to influence Sardar Patel, who was in the Congress Parliamentary Board to keep out Satyamurti form Madras.

Kamaraj, besides being Satyamurti's disciple, became his adviser also. Satyamurti depended on him for advice and support for any important action or decision he took. Later the Vice-Chancellorship of Madras University was offered to him. Satyamurti, who had always taken an active interest in the University, was inclined to accept it. But Kamaraj, with his shrewdness, advised him to reject it as he felt if was a trap to keep him away form active politics. Satyamurti took Kamaraj's wise counsel and rejected the offer. Gandhiji, after suspending the Mass Satyagraha Movement, lunched in 1941 the Individual Satyagraha Movement as a mark of protest against the involvement of India in the World War II. He chose his close disciples to offer individual Satyagraha. In Tamil Nadu, Rajaji, Satyamurti and others courted arrest. Kamaraj was campaigning and addressing meetings against people contributing to the war fund. He was arrested and detained in Vellore jail along with other leaders. In 1940 when the Congress was in a majority in the Virudhunagar Municipal 'Council and when Kamaraj was in prison, the Congress majority in the Municipal Council elected

him as Chairman. When he was released in 1941, he attended a meeting of the Council. Kamaraj was requested to be the Chairman, but he declined the honour on the plea that he was too engrossed in party work and he could not do justice to the honoured post of Chairman.

With the rise of Satyamurti in the political horizon, Kamaraj became his ardent follower and faithful lieutenant. Satyamurti seeing his potentiality, as an able organiser, took his help in organising congress work in Tamil Nadu. Kamaraj was largely instrumental in projecting the image of Satyamurti as a national leader. The Satyamurti-Kamaraj combine became a strong political force and it lasted till the end. Kamaraj gave his unflinching loyalty and he kept himself in the back-ground, doing silent work in organising youth and workers in the Congress. Satyamurti, in turn, built up Kamaraj as a nation leader and his worthy successor. Satyamurti helped to get Kamaraj elected as President of the Provincial Congress Committee, while he himself was content to be the Secretary. Kamaraj justified the confidence kept in him by his leader and made the congress organisation in Tamil Nadu a well-knit body. Satyamurti fully believed in fighting for freedom through the legislature. Though Kamaraj did not agree with Satyamurti with regard to the Legislative programme, he supported Satyamurti and organised a mass campaign in support of the programme. It was an uphill task. Kamaraj, the man of action, did not made thundering speeches like his leader, but organised support by silent work. There was a clash between Rajaji and Satyamurti. Kamaraj stood loyal behind Satyamurti and organised the support of youth and the masses.

V

"QUIT INDIA' MOVEMENT

ON AUGUST 8th 1942, the All-India Congress Committee, which met at Bombay passed the famous "Quit India" resolution. Gandhiji exhorted Congressmen and patriots to activate the new struggle, with the slogan "Do or Die". The Government was already alert and ready to pounce and round up all the leaders, without giving a chance for their organising the movement. At almost every railway station on the route form Bombay to Madras and other places, the police were stationed in force. Kamaraj had planned to go from Bombay to Andhra, with Sanjiva Reddy. But when he learnt that he was likely to be arrested even before reaching Andhra, he changed his plan and decided to go straight to Madras. At Arkonam, a posse of policemen had been posted at the platfrom to arrest leaders returning form Bombay. Kamaraj quietly left the station unnoticed by the police. He went by bust to Ranipet. There he went to the house of Kalyanarama Iyer, a veteran Congressman. Since the police might get a scent of his whereabouts, Kalyanarama Iyer took him to Janab Mohanmmad Suleman, a prominent rice merchant and a staunch nationalist, who accommodated him in a cottage in his garden. Later in the night a policeman entered the garden. Thinking he was coming to arrest him, Kamaraj hid in a room. When Kalyanarama Iyer asked the Sub-Inspector what he wanted, he told him that the Superintendent of Police was coming to Ranipet next day and he wanted to find out if he could be accommodated in the house. Suleman agreed. The sub-Inspector looked round the house, and left the house saying it was too small for the Superintendent. Suleman, Iyer and Kamaraj heaved a sigh of relief. Kalyanarama Iyer and Kamaraj then went by taxi to Vanniyambadi where they

boarded a train to Thanjavur. On their way at Villupuram station also, the escaped the vigilance of the police and reached Thanjavur the next morning. There they went to the house of Narayanswami, a Congress leader, and after meeting local Congressmen, they left for Trichy by train. At Trichy Junction, there was a contingent of policemen watching for Congress leaders. They slipped out of the compartment on the wrong side and crossing the railways line, they went to a hotel, both of them dressed like villagers, with towel round their heads and dhotis tied up above the knees. They met workers at the house of M.S. Rangaswami, auditor and another Congressman, and left for Madurai by car. After meeting the leaders and Congress workers there, Kamaraj sent Kalayanarama Iyer to tour Tirunelveli district and left with Kumaraswami Raja (later Chief Minister of Madras). When Kalyanarama Iyer returned to Ranipet, he was arrested and detained under the Defence of India Rules. Kamaraj returned to Virudhunagar after finishing his organising work when a police warrant was waiting for him. He himself informed the Police Sub-Inspector that he was ready to be arrested. Though the Sub-Inspector a nationalist at heart, told him he could take it easy and he could arrest him later. Kamaraj said he had finished all his work and there was no point in delaying. He was taken into custody and as in the case of others, he was detained under the Defence of India Rules and sent to Vellore jail, where already there were a number of other leaders. For three years he was under detention without trial and released along with other leaders in 1945.

VI

FATHER FIGURE

WHEN KAMARAJ was released from jail in July 1945, much water had flown under the cooum bridge. Satyamurti had passed away in March 1943. Rajaji resigned from the Congress in 1942 (he had lost he support of Congressmen after his dissention form the Congress, by his critical attitude of the Quit India movement. He courted unpopularity in his characteristic way). On the issue of Pakistan he was much maligned and misinterpreted. The Muslim league under Jinnah's leadership took advantage of its position and started a movement by which the Muslim dominated areas were to be constituted as a separate nation as Pakistan, and India was to be partitioned. This was the condition laid down by Jinnah for fighting for independence; the two nation theory was not acceptable to Gandhiji, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel and other leaders. Rajaji on the other hand wanted to enlist the support of the Muslim League in the attainment of Independence by "conceding to the idea of Pakistan" (It was one of Rajaji's characteristically clever phraseologies). He did not want Pakistan to be conceded straightaway; what he said was let the idea of Pakistan be conceded, to enable the Muslim league to stand side by side with Congress to achieve freedom; after achievement of freedom, let the whole question be referred to the people to decide, giving the option to the Muslim League to remain united with the Congress. This was too clever a suggestion which could not be fully understood by either the people or even Congressmen. Thus arose a public feeling against Rajaji that he was pro-Muslim league and pro-partition. Gandhiji himself declared that such a partition could be effected only over his dead body. This was another major factor for Rajaji's unpopularity at that time. So Rajaji went into retirement. For three years, he was away

from all politics and the Congress. Tamil Nadu had no the outstanding leader as most of them including Kamaraj were in jail. Kamaraj was released along with others in 1945. The situation in Tamil Nadu called for a strong leadership. Some of the staunch followers of Rajaji felt that it would be a good things if he and Kamaraj could come together and under their joint leadership, the Congress in Tamil Nadu would be strong, which was necessary in view of the coming election. The two leaders met and Rajaji suggested that he and Kamaraj should tour Tamil Nadu together to establish that there was no disagreement between them. Unfortunately, this did not materialise. Kamaraj, who had gone to Virudunagar, was surprised to find a report that Rajaji had been elected to the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee. Kamaraj, who was still the President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, was surprised and chagrined that he was not consulted or even informed. He was not aware that Rajaji, who had resigned form the Congress, had been readmitted by the Congress President, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad at Rajaji's own request. Kamaraj challenged the validity of the election. This was a turning point in their relations; the rift between them became wider. There was a lot of ding-dong battle within the Central leaders, including the Congress President, Maulana Azad ; Sardar Patel tried to patch it up. On Sardar Patel's advice, Kamaraj met Rajaji and they came to an agreement by which, the Parliamentary Board consisting of eight members, would have three members nominated by Kamaraj and three by Rajaji. It was hoped this arrangement would work satisfactorily.

Early in 1946, Gandhiji came to Madras to preside over the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of the Hindi Prachar Sabha. He was invited to go to the temples at Madurai and Palani which had been thrown open to Harijans, when Rajaji was the Premier (Chief Minister) of Madras. During his visit to Madras, Madurai and Palani, he was apprised of the opposition to Rajaji's resuming the leadership of the Congress in Tamil Nadu. Gandhiji writing in Harijan paid a tribute to Rajaji and said that he was pained to learn that a "clique" was working against Rajaji. Gandhiji also warned the Tamil Nadu Congressmen that they would be losing his valuable

services. He had replied to a question at Vijayawada, that Rajaji was by far the best man to be the Premier of Madras. This naturally offended Kamaraj who felt that Gandhiji's reference to "clique" was a reflection on him and his colleagues. He resigned from the Tamil Nadu Parliamentary Board as he felt it showed lack of confidence in him as President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee. He issued a long statement explaining his position, that, though he did not believe in the Parliamentary programme as such, he accepted it as a means to further the country's struggle for freedom. He felt that all this conflict arose because of the Parliamentary programme. In spite of Gandhiji's appeal, Kamaraj stuck to his decision to keep out of the Parliamentary Board. The Parliamentary Board made the selection of candidates for election in Tamil Nadu, in consultation with Rajaji'; but ultimately only a minister of Rajaji's nominees was chosen. Seeing that the feeling against him by the Congress group in Tamil Nadu was strong, Rajaji made another sudden and dramatic exit and he wrote to Gandhiji that he was retiring.

The Congress had swept the polls in the 1946 elections in Madras Presidency. Kamaraj was elected unopposed to the Assembly from the Aruppukottai Constituency. The question of who was to head the Congress ministry in Madras loomed large. Ultimately T. Prakasam, the veteran Andhra leader, was elected by the party by a small majority. From the inception, a rift began between Prakasam and Kamaraj. In the selection of Ministers, Prakasam had his own way, ignoring Kamaraj. Prakasam was a strong self-willed man and he never consulted Kamaraj or others in running the administration. Soon the growing feeling against Prakasam gathered momentum and within a few months, Prakasam was voted out of leadership.

Omandur Ramaswami Reddiar, a simple and straightforward man, and Gandhian in outlook, was elected leader. He did not hit off well with Kamaraj. He was succeeded by Kumaraswami Raja, a respected leader form Rajapalayam.

In all these shufflings of leadership, Kamaraj played a prominent role.

VII

PARTY COMMAND TAKEN OVER

THE ELECTIONS held in 1952 resulted in a set-back to the Congress in Madras. The Congress fared badly in Madras, lost the massive majority of the previous period. It secured barely 152 seats out of 375. But it was still the single largest party—the opposition was an odd conglomeration of half a dozen parties with diverse views and ideologies — Communist, Socialist, Kisan Mazdoor, Praja, Krishok Lok, Tamil Nadu Toilers, Commonweal. Kumaraswami Raja, who was defeated in the election, submitted the resignation of his ministry. Kamaraj was very much affected by the debacle, as he was the chief architect of the Tamil Nadu Congress. However, he was wise and shrewd enough to realise that the Congress by itself could not take up the reins of Government and left to himself he would have let the opposition to form the ministry. He knew that such a ministry would not last long and Congress would then get an opportunity to marshal its strength and assume power. The Untied Democratic Front under the leadership of Prakasam, was prepared to form a ministry. But a majority of Congress members in the new Assembly did not want a non-Congress ministry even at the outset of the introduction of the new constitution. The new Governor of Madras Sri Sri Prakasa also did not want to be confronted with a non-Congress ministry at the start of gubernatorial career. The congress Working Committee after due consideration of the situation, did not want the Congress to lose hole of the opportunity and to let power in the province slip out of the Congress hands and taken up by the opposition. So it advised the Congress to take up the responsibility. The next step was the choice of a leader who could stand up to the situation. Several names were proposed and considered. But none of them

could command a strong position in the difficult circumstances. It was at this stage, again well-wishers like T. T. Krishnamachari, and others put their heads together and came to the unanimous conclusion that C. Rajagopalachari was the only person who could brave the situation and steer the ship of the State tactfully.

Rajaji, after holding the high posts of Central Minister, Governor of Bengal and first Indian Governor General of India, had taken to 'Agnatavasam', one of his familiar retirements. He was persuaded now to come out of it and save the province and the Congress. Reluctantly he yielded to the pressure. But he wanted to ensure that Kamaraj, who was the President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, was agreeable and he would support him. He met Kamaraj and asked him. Kamaraj said he had no objection, but he expressed the view that the party should not form the government. Ultimately the matter was referred to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the Congress President. Nehru opined that Rajaji should get elected to the Assembly as, on principle, the Chief Minister should be an elected member of the Assembly. Rajaji had his own views and his own way of dealing with the matter. As soon as he was unanimously elected as leader of the Congress Legislature Party, he suggested to Kumaraswamy Raja, who continued as Chief Minister in the caretaker ministry, that he might be nominated to the Legislative Council. Rajaji was always reluctant to face the tediousness of an election. He preferred the short-cut, in such matters. Further his age and health made him averse to undergo the strain and stress of an election campaign. However good and laudable, the democratic method was sometimes unpredictable and gave the opposite results in his view. He justified his stand, when criticised in the Assembly later, that instead of becoming representative of one constituency, from which he would be elected, he was now represented in all the 150 constituencies of the members who had elected him. Typically Rajaji, who along could give such clever replies!

Rajaji was invited to form the new ministry.

With shrewd political acumen, Rajaji included Manickavelu Naicker, founder and leader of the Toilers Party which had considerable strength, in his cabinet, thus strengthening the support for the Congress party and his ministry. The United Front opposition became disunited and split, reducing the opposition strength.

Kamaraj resigned his Presidentship of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee which he had shouldered for twelve long years. The reason given was that since he was elected to the Lok Sabha in 1952, he would not be able to devote his full time as the Tamil Nadu Congress Chief. Further, he felt that the President of the Congress Committee should be a person of Rajaji's choice, to facilitate smooth working.

Dr. P. Subbarayan, barrister, was an ardent admirer of Rajaji (he came from Salem District from where Rajaji also came and Rajaji had been his lawyer, friend and guru) had just returned from Indonesia where he had been sent as India's Ambassador. Rajaji suggested he might he elected as Tamil Nadu Congress Committee President. Subbarayan was first hesitant, but ultimately he agreed and he was elected President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee.

Subbarayan's tenure of office as President of the T.N.C.C. was short-lived. He was a good sportsman and a hearty type of a person but the stress and strain and pressures of the onerous position of presidentship of a political organisation was too much for him. Within a year he resigned. There was no one else to take up the responsibility — except Kamaraj. Kamaraj was again elected President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee.

VIII

RAJAJI-KAMARAJ COMBINE

THERE WAS GENERAL jubilation in Congress circles and everybody expected that the Rajaji-Kamaraj combine, the former as the head of the administration and the latter as the head of the Congress Organisation, would be formidable and would work well for the good of the province. The two leaders now came closer than ever. At the unveiling of the portrait of Kamaraj at Madras, Rajaji eulogized Kamaraj for his services to the Congress and the people. Rajaji declared that when Kamaraj was the President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, he had no worry about the Congress organisation while Kamaraj acknowledged, that with Rajaji as the Chief Minister, he had no anxiety about the administration. Unfortunately this state of mutual understanding was short-lived. Perhaps the evil eye had fallen and within a year, Rajaji was obliged to resign. But within the short span of his office, Rajaji introduced some bold and benevolent measures. The very first act he did was to withdraw all controls over foodgrain and the abolition of rationing. The controls and rationing, far from benefiting the people, as it should be, had resulted in black-marketing, artificial scarcity and hoarding. By a stroke of the pen, Rajaji removed the controls and rationing. It has an electric effect and rice became easily available in the open market. The other daring measure he introduced was Tenancy Reform in Thanjvur district by introducing the Pannayal Act (Pannayals are farm labourers). Rajaji's bold measure cut the ground under the Communists, who had been active in the district organising the farm labourers against the landlords and planning to take away the land from the latter.

The 3rd bold step he took was introducing a novel scheme for enabling all school-going children receive the benefit of education.

One of the main impediments was lack of adequate teachers and also school buildings to admit a large number of children. Building new schools and the availability of more trained teachers would take a considerable time and it would also involve considerable expense. So Rajaji ingeniously struck upon the "shift system" using the existing buildings and available teachers, in two shifts. Rajaji further wanted to cut down the duration of working to three hours. He advanced the argument, that while the children could get the benefit of education, they need not be disturbed from pursuing their traditional occupations, as it would considerably augment the income of the family. This was immediately seized upon by communalist leaders of the Dravida Kazhagam that it was a clever Brahmin conspiracy to perpetuate the caste system. The opinion against the scheme gathered strength and became an agitation and campaign against Rajaji. Rajaji, always took any important step, only after deep consideration and after convincing himself that it was good. Once he took a decision he was unshakable. His decisions on important matters were taken almost always on his own, without consulting others. In this case, he did not even consult his cabinet colleagues (to whom also it was a surprise); the Chief Minister should normally consult the Cabinet when such important policy decisions are taken or legislation introduced. Rajaji was an individualist by nature and did what he believed as right and he had always his own unique way of doing things. This was not due to any arrogance (as was mistaken often by his opponents and even some of his friends, but due to an innate quality of self righteousness). As one of his closest disciples, an eminent writer and journalist (Kalki Krishnamurti) used to say, many of Rajaji's actions which were often very puzzling, could be understood only by a devout few who had implicit faith and loyalty towards him. Kamaraj was greatly surprised as many others, when the scheme was announced. He advised Rajaji to drop it. The size of the opposition to the scheme began swelling and even Congressmen began to criticise it. It was during Rajaji's regime that Madras was partitioned and Andhra became a separate province.

In 1954, a vigorous and virulent signature campaign was started by Congressmen against the leadership of Rajaji. The Assembly Session was going on in March. Rajaji suddenly announced that due to his ill-health he was resigning (another of those sudden surprises of Rajaji). When again the leadership of the party came up, Rajaji strove to get C. Subramaniam, till then one of his ardent followers, elected. The majority of the party members were not in favour of it. The party was almost in a crisis. At this juncture, several of the members felt no one could step into the gap except Kamaraj. Kamaraj was never anxious to become a minister or Chief Minister. But the members of the party, prevailed on him to save the situation by agreeing to take up the responsibility. Ultimately he yielded. His name and C. Subramaniam's name (on the pressure of Rajaji) were proposed. Kamaraj was elected leader of the Assembly by a huge majority. Even then he was reluctant to become the Chief Minister. He was shrewd enough to know the implications. He would have preferred to remain the leader of the party which was more powerful, than be tied down to the responsibility of being the Chief Minister. He consulted Pandit Nehru, the Congress President and Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant. They both urged him to take up the responsibility, though Kamaraj preferred to be the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee President. Another reason was that Kamaraj realised that it would not be possible to please all his supporters, many of whom aspired for ministership and position. He went to Delhi to consult the Congress President Pandit Nehru, Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant and others. They told him to take up the Chief Ministership. He finally agreed on the assurance of his partymen that they would not bring pressure upon him for anything nor ask for favours, if they wanted him as Chief Minister. Rajaji resigned on April 8th and Kamaraj assumed office on the Tamil New Year's Day — April 13th 1957. His Guru, Satyamurti's prophecy made in one of his public utterances, at a public meeting in Trichy, where Kamaraj was also present, that such an able organiser and patriot would one day become the head of Government in Fort St. George, became true on that

memorable Tamil New Year's day. Satyamurti's soul would have rejoiced, as of thousands of people in Tamil Nadu.

IX

TROUBLES AND TRIALS FACED

WHEN HE took up the Chief Ministership, he disappointed his close followers and surprised many friends and several people by retaining some of the old ministers — M. Bhaktavatsalam, C. Subramaniam and M.A. Manickavelu and drafted in four new members: Srimati Lourdammal Simon, R. Venkataraman, V. Ramiah and P. Kakkan. R.Venkataraman was a lawyer and a labour leader, and had been with Kamaraj from the early days. He was elected to Lok Sabha in 1952 and was there till 1957. He had made a mark in the Lok Sabha debates. Kamaraj gave him the Industries and Labour portfolio. He distinguished himself by giving a fillip to the industries in Tamil Nadu and helping small industrialists. The Industrial Estate in Guindy near Madras, is a standing monument of his achievements. Several small scale industries began thriving, making Tamil Nadu an example. Kakkan was unassuming, simple Harijan leader, brought to the forefront by Kamaraj by making him a minister. Lourdammal Simon, a hitherto unknown Christian lady, was also Kamaraj's friend. Kamaraj hit two birds with one stone by including her in the cabinet, for she represented women and the Christian minority and also the Kanyakumari district from which she hailed, and which had been transferred to Tamil Nadu from Travancore under the reorganisation of the States.

Soon after Kamaraj assumed office, serious trouble broke out in Madukalathur Taluk, Ramanathapuram district ; there was a clash between the Thevars (a powerful community in the district) and the harijans. The clash was between Muthuramalinga Thevar who was a powerful leader of the Thevars, and Immanual, a Harijan Christian leader. Immanual was allegedly murdered by

Thevar's men. When the police went to Keezhathooval to apprehend the culprits and quell the riot, they were attacked by a mob. When the police opened fire on the mob, armed with weapons, five persons were killed. The Government ordered an enquiry by a Senior Civilian Officer; the report submitted by him justified the police firing. This did not satisfy the Thevars nor the opposition members in the Assembly, who demanded a judicial enquiry. The Communist Party moved a motion of no-confidence against the ministry, which was defeated. Ultimately the disturbances were put down. Kamaraj saw that the root of the trouble was elsewhere. He shrewdly realised that the eastern parts of Ramanathapuram district had been neglected. So, besides rebuilding the houses of Thevars and Harijians, he launched a programme in the agricultural and industrial fields for the development of this backward area.

This is one more example of Kamaraj's shrewdness and clever way of tackling problems, by going to the roots of these problems.

X

THE KAMARAJ PLAN

IN THE third general elections held in 1962, the Congress, though it retained a comfortable majority, yet lost thirteen seats in the Assembly. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, under the dynamic leadership of C.N. Annadurai emerged as a strong opposition, with 50 members. The D.M.K.'s clever electioneering campaign had sown the seeds of communal hatred and Kamaraj felt very disturbed over it. At the Congress Working Committee meeting held after the election, it was felt that secession was against the Constitution. Parliament passed an amendment to the Constitution that every candidate should take an oath that he or she would uphold the sovereignty and integrity of India. Immediately, C.N. Annadurai announced that the D.M.K had given up its secession demand.

Kamaraj was greatly distressed at the clamour for office among Congressmen— the very thing he abhorred and wanted to avoid. He saw decay setting in the Congress which he wanted to arrest. He also found the opposition parties were now trading under communal and parochial feelings. Kamaraj, who was essentially an out-and-out nationalist, wanted to stop this canker. He thought that Congressmen must now set their thought and actions in the direction as otherwise it was not only the congress but also the country that would suffer. So he wanted Congress leaders to work towards this end. He wanted to set an example by stepping down from office and devoting his energies to organise the Congress strongly internally.

Two successive defeats suffered by the Congress in the bye-election—one in the Congress stronghold of Tiruvannamalai, where Kamaraj had campaigned for ten days, set him thinking seriously

and he was now convinced the urgent need to stop the rot. So he decided to give up office and devote himself to reorganise, rectify and strengthen the party. Kamaraj saw that the Congress was losing touch with the masses, while the D.M.K. built up its influence, by infiltrating into the masses; he also realised that the defeat of the Congress in the Tiruvannamalai election was the lack of leadership and wrong choice of the candidate. The lack of sincere workers was another important reason. The D.M.K. scored one above the Congress in having an army of sincere workers, and a strong organisation which was well-knit ; so Kamaraj wanted to revitalise the Congress and make it strong. When Kamaraj met the Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru, in July, 1963 at Hyderabad, he expressed a desire to step down from the Chief Ministership and devote his energies for revitalising the party. The Prime Minister saw the force of his argument and wanted the idea to be applied to the whole country, in other States too. The plan was discussed in the Congress Working Committee, which heartily welcomed it. Pandit Nehru himself wanted to set an example and offered to shed his Prime Ministership, but the working Committee unanimously set its face against such a step as it would be disastrous for the Congress and the nation. So Pandit Nehru was obliged to withdraw his offer to resign.

All the Union Ministers and the Chief Ministers, submitted their resignations under the "Kamaraj Plan". But only the resignations of six Union Ministers — Morarji Desai, S.K. Patil, Jagjivan Ram, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Shrimali and Gopal Reddi were accepted by Pandit Nehru. It was even imputed that the Kamaraj plan was a clever ruse to weed out unwanted ministers.

XI

AN ABLE CAPTAIN

THE DAWN of the new year brought good tidings as well as bad. At the instance of the Soviet Premier Kosygin, India and Pakistan were brought together to open negotiations. At Tashkent (in the Soviet Union) India's Premier Lal Bahadur Shastri and Pakistan President General Ayub Khan met and an agreement was reached on the conflict between the two nations. Ink had not dried on the agreement document, when tragedy struck and Lal Bahadur Shastri succumbed to a heart attack in the Uzbek Capital. Before India could fully rejoice over the agreement, the nation went into mourning over the passing away of its Premier who had achieved the impossible. Lal Bahadur's credo rose to heights, when with great courage and by resolute action, he ordered firm resistance to Pak aggression. His credit went sky high by this great act of courage and consequent success. As the Tamil saying goes "Though small of form, great in prowess." Though he was a man of peace when the occasion demanded it, he showed infinite courage.

With his passing away, again the problem of choosing a successor confronted the Nation. The Congress Working committee met to consider the question. Prominent among the aspirants was Morarji Desai. Kamaraj and the Syndicate had not changed their attitude towards him and they were not inclined to favour him. But who else could be considered suitable? This exposed the minds of the Syndicate and Kamaraj. Kamaraj was, as usual, for consensus; Morarji Bhai wanted to fight it out in a regular election. He had even approached Kamaraj and asked for his support to ensure his unanimous election. The Working committee authorised Kamaraj to work for a consensus and if a consensus was not possible the Parliamentary party, should elect a person.

Again there were hectic consultations of members of Parliament, Chief Ministers and State Congress leaders. Kamaraj favoured Srimati Indira Gandhi.

Earlier, Atulya Ghosh and others of the Syndicate tried to persuade Kamaraj himself to assume the responsibility. Kamaraj could have perhaps easily got it, if he had been so minded. But he spurned the idea; "For heaven's sake, don't drag me into this" he is reported to have said. Again it showed the man who had the courage to turn his head away from power, when it was offered to him on a platter, unasked for by him.

He was averse to become the Premier when it was offered to him. Few people will have that kind of self-denial. His prestige rose sky-high now. Temptation of office and power could not spoil his mind. The one person who was non-controversial and who, in his view, would be free from angularities and amenable to others' views was Srimati Indira Gandhi. She had been Congress President; she had attained an All-India personality. She had the halo of her father. Above all, half of the nations's electorate was composed of women and their support was sure. The Chief Ministers in Congress ruled States actively canvassed and campaigned for Srimati Indira Gandhi. Morarji Desai, in an open letter to the members of Parliament, telling them of their "special responsibility to rise above personal prejudices" appealed to the M.P.s to assert their right and not to yield to outside pressure.

Kamaraj met Morarji Bhai and requested him to withdraw from the contest. Morarji Bhai asked him as to why? Kamaraj told him Mrs. Gandhi had a majority. Morarji Bhai said that it was to be decided by ballot. Kamaraj's efforts at reconciliation proved futile.

On 19th January 1966, the Congress Legislature Party met Kamaraj presiding. The result of the ballot was that Srimati Indira Gandhi won by a large majority while Morarji Bhai got 169 votes. Kamaraj congratulated Srimati Indira Gandhi and appealed for complete cooperation with the new leader. Morarji Bhai offered his congratulations and good wishes to Srimati Gandhi and extended

his cooperation "consistent with his self respect". Praises were showered on Kamaraj for the manner he had managed the situation and conducted the election. Though his efforts at 'consensus' did not succeed this time, he maintained the constitutional conventions and followed the democratic path. The prestige of Congress President was enhanced and he rose in stature.

Kamaraj was able to establish a close and cordial relationship with Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri's during his Prime Ministership. He wanted the same close understanding now between the new Prime Minister and the Congress President on all major matters of national policy. He respected parliamentary conventions and did not want interference by the Congress President or the Congress Working Committee in the day-to-day decisions of the Government. But he wanted utmost co-ordination between the Cabinet and the party organisation in matters of major policy.

Kamaraj was a stickler for discipline within the Congress organisation. Internal factions arose in the Congress organisations in the States and this became a headache for the Congress President. But Kamaraj put down with a firm hand such indiscipline and dissension threatening unity within the Congress.

A crisis arose in Kerala, where some ministers in the State Cabinet forwarded a charge-sheet against the Chief Minister, Sankar. Kamaraj was indignant that the charges should have been publicised before they could be considered in the party. Ultimately a no-confidence motion against the ministry was carried in the State Assembly. In the elections that ensued in 1965, the Kerala Congress did not get a majority. Since no party could command a majority, Governor's rule had to be reimposed in the State. After the 1967 election, the leftist alliance came to power. But Kamaraj was not worried since he knew that a coalition, composed of parties with different ideals, would not last long.

In Punjab and Orissa ministerial and party crisis cropped up and Kamaraj dealt them with firmness. In Punjab, criticisms and complaints were levelled against the Chief Minister Pratap Singh

Kairon, during Pandit Jawaharlal's Prime Ministership. A Commission was appointed by Nehru, to enquire into the charges. The Commission held that some of the major charges levelled were true. Kamaraj and Lal Bahadur Shastri (who succeeded Nehru) succeeded in getting Kairon to resign. Kamaraj was responsible for the election of Ram Kishen, a very unassuming person of great integrity, as leader. In Assam, the firm intervention of Kamaraj averted a cabinet crisis when the Chief Minister Barooah differed. He called upon Barooah to resign; the latter had no option but to obey the Congress President. Thus a crisis was averted and Kamaraj's credit went up by one more point. The able captain had steered the Congress ship adeptly.

XII

ATTAINS INTERNATIONAL STATUS

KAMARAJ HAD now become a top rank national leader and his name and fame transcended the country's borders across to other continents. The United States and Soviet Union had been extending invitations to him to visit these countries. However, in view of the internal situation in the country, Kamaraj had to postpone his visits to these countries. When Kosygin visited India he renewed the invitation to Kamaraj. The American Vice-President, Herbert Humphrey, when came to the funeral of Lal Bahadur Shastri, described Kamaraj as "One of the greatest Political leaders" and invited him to visit the United States. He accepted the invitation from the U.S.S.R. and he planned to visit that country in May 1966. But due to the developments in the country, he was obliged to postpone his visit to July that year. Kamaraj was accompanied by Sri R. Venkataraman, then Minister for Industries in the Madras Government. Venkataraman acted as his interpreter. This was a unique visit to the Soviet Union. Kamaraj was received in Moscow by Prime Minister Kosygin, and Brezhnev, the First Secretary of the Communist Party. He was entertained to lunch in the Kremlin by the Parliamentary Group Committee. He visited important cities and went round Moscow. What impressed him most was the discipline and hard work of the people which enabled Russia to attain the high place it held. Kamaraj impressed the Soviet leaders and Russian people as a man from and of the masses. His simplicity and utter disregard for pompous paraphernalia earned the admiration of the Soviet leaders and people. He dressed in the same way as at home—with dhoti worn in Madras fashion, his threefourth sleeve shirt and a towel cum angavastram over his shoulder—all in spotless white Khadi. He never changed to any

"formal dress" for parties, dinners or State functions. His unsophisticated behaviour and proletarian dress and appearance won the admiration of the people of the Soviet Union. The way Kamaraj conducted himself with the leaders and others who came into contact with him was simple, straightforward and his replies to their questions and the remarkably shrewd manner in which he discussed several matters with them and his self assurance and forthrightness enabled him to be on level with his hosts. But he was very shrewd and clever and never let himself slip unguardedly or committed himself to any remark which might show our country in any unfavourable light. His unique confidence and self assurance enabled him to move with persons high and eminent. He was utterly free from any complexes. This put him on level with the highest placed dignitaries he came across.

After touring in the Soviet Union for ten days, Kamaraj visited the East European countries—East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. In all these countries he had unprecedented reception and welcome. He had intimate talks with Marshall Tito, who earlier met him at the Avadi Congress during his visit to India.

To Kamaraj, the visit to Russia and Eastern Europe was a unique experience. He stood the test with poise and dignity and came off with flying colours. This was his first tour outside India barring his visits to Ceylon and Malaysia earlier.

When Kamaraj returned to Madras after his tour, an unprecedented tumultuous welcome awaited him, reminiscent of the return of his guru Satyamurti after his visit abroad. Kamaraj had now earned international fame. He had made a very good impression in all the countries he visited and the image and status of India was enhanced. The popular sentiment in these countries for India was roused and India's non-alignment policy was highly appreciated.

Kamaraj's American visit had to be postponed till the next year. But unfortunately it never came off.

The Congress Working Committee met in October 1963 to consider the election of a new President to succeed D. Sanjivaiah whose term expired at the end of 1963. Sanjiva Reddy, the Andhra leader, Nijalingappa, Chief Minister of Mysore, Atulya Ghosh, President, Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee and Kamaraj—who were called the "Syndicate" by political observers and the press—met at Tirupati and in the holy presence of Lord Venkateswara they discussed the problems facing the country and in particular the Presidentship of the Congress and the choice of a successor to Nehru. In the then prevailing conditions in the country, it was felt that the choice of the President should be unanimous. The other important decision was that they should act in unison to provide a sort of collective leadership to be in effective control of the country's affairs. Morarji Desai, who was a senior most leader was in the picture and might have easily stepped into the shoes of Nehru, but for some strong opposition within the Congress and a prejudice against Morarji Desai. So Lal Bahadur Shastri was the most acceptable and obvious choice. As regards the Congress Presidentship, the choice was between Atulya Ghosh and Kamaraj. Nehru was in favour of Kamaraj and the Working Committee unanimously proposed the name of Kamaraj. Kamaraj himself never even dreamt that he would land himself in the Congress Presidential Seat. He never sought or aspired for it. It was the force of circumstances, and cumulative effect of events that led him on to the top. Nehru had developed a great admiration for Kamaraj for his ability as an organiser and his proven success as an administrator as Chief Minister of Madras. For the third time in the annals of the Indian National Congress, a Tamilian earned this national honour, the other two being C. Vijayaragavachariar of Salem and S. Srinivasa Iyengar.

The choice of Kamaraj was favoured by Nehru, for more reasons than one. Apart from Nehru's personal feelings towards Kamaraj, Kamaraj had become a national leader now, especially after the "Kamaraj Plan". Though he never spoke or made thundering speeches on the Congress Committee or outside, his

quiet efficiency and strong disposition earned the regard and admiration of all. Those, who in the early stages, were inclined to scoff, began to admire and respect him.

At the Bhubaneshwar session of the Congress, the goal of the Congress was defined as "democratic socialism". This was a new coinage in the political vocabulary. The leftist elements in the Congress had become more prominent and their influence was felt. Nehru himself was a sworn socialist. Even when Gandhiji was at the helm of the Congress, Nehru was fighting for socialism. But he never approved of the violent methods. His socialism was tempered by Gandhian idealism of non-violence. Kamaraj also was inclined towards socialist ideas, but he too was a staunch advocate on non-violence. Kamaraj always looked at it from the common man's point of view. He was a son of the soil; if socialism could help the poor people to better way of life, he would unequivocally accept it.

So the resolution in the Bhubaneshwar Congress, which changed the goal of the Congress, laid stress on "democratic socialism" through non-violent means. Though the hot-heads would have liked to have a more strongly and fiercely worded resolution, it was Kamaraj's cool, but strong attitude which steered the resolution through. Kamaraj's main task was to preserve unity with dignity. In this endeavour he succeeded in a large measure.

After the passing away of Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri was elected leader of the Congress Party. Kamaraj, by his dexterous handling of the situation saw to it that Lal Bahadur was elected leader. Kamaraj, on the advice of President Radhakrishnan, set about the election of the leader, by the Congress Parliamentary party. He urged upon the party to elect a leader unanimously; Kamaraj set about eliciting the views of Chief Ministers, party members and other leaders. It was no easy task, for the pressures and counter-pressures were great. But Kamaraj told his colleagues that the "consensus" method was desirable in the circumstances. He considered that consensus of opinion among Congressmen was

essential so that the choice of leadership of the party would be unanimous. The working Committee authorised the President Kamaraj to go ahead with "operation consensus". With quiet efficiency, he handled the operation with consummate skill and ability and marshalled the majority opinion in favour of the consensus. It was a triumph for Kamaraj. Morarji Desai, the veteran senior leader, with Gandhian ideals, was an aspirant. Lal Bahadur Shastri was favoured by Kamaraj and the Syndicate composed of Atulya Ghosh, Sanjiva Reddi, Nijalingappa and S.K. Patil. The names of Jagjivan Ram, Srimati Indira Gandhi and Gulzarilal Nanda were also mooted. However, Lal Bahadur Shastri had overwhelming support, mainly because Kamaraj sponsored him.

Kamaraj met Morarji Desai and appraised him of the consensus. Morarji Desai, seeing that the consensus was for Lal Bahadur Shastri, receded out of the picture. Though Morarji Bhai was naturally disappointed being a true Gandhian and disciplinarian, he accepted the position with grace. In fact he seconded the proposal of Lal Bahadur Shastri's election at the party meeting. This is one of the highest triumphs of Kamaraj. When the Congress Legislature Party met on 2nd June, the members and Chief Ministers and other leaders of the Congress Legislature Party, foreign dignitaries and leaders from the States who had come as visitors, rose spontaneously as Kamaraj entered.

Kamaraj, presiding over the meeting, explained the circumstances and manner in which the consensus was obtained and thanked the members of Parliament and Congress leaders from the States and all the members of the Working Committee for making it possible to elect the leader unanimously. He stressed the need for collective leadership and collective approach which alone would ensure the successful implementation of the task ahead.

He said that hitherto they had been functioning complacently under the protective umbrella of Pandit Nehru's leadership, which was no longer available. They had to proceed with utmost caution, care and sense of responsibility and would preserve the unity and

the great legacy left by their beloved leader, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.

There were several factors that led to the choice of Lal Bahadur Shastri. Though Morarji Desai was a man of impeceable character, utmost purity and Gandhian outlook, these very factors, in a way worked against him. Lal Bahadur Shastri was imbued with all these high qualities, and had a softness of nature and resilience needed for leadership.

Kamaraj strongly believed that the Prime Ministership of India was not an office to be hawked about or sought for. It should go to one who did not seek for it. Not only did Kamaraj earn a good name for himself in this important event, but India's prestige for fostering democracy went up and the unity of the party and the nation was preserved.

XIII

KAMARAJ AND THE FOOD PROBLEM

IN 1965, a serious situation arose in the country. Due to a series of natural calamities like drought and failure of the monsoon, there was a serious crisis in the food situation. In Madras the Government introduced controls over the movement of rice to prevent smuggling and Government took upon itself the task of procurement of surplus rice in the districts. Madras city was the most to suffer. Long queues waited for hours to get a small quota of rice in the fair price shops which had been opened for the purpose of people's facility. Kamaraj, who was in Madras at that time, saw the plight of the people. He sensed the feeling of the people and felt that immediate and effective steps should be taken to avert a serious crisis. He conferred with T. T. Krishnamachari the then Union Finance Minister, who was in Madras at that time and arranged to rush more foodgrains to Madras. They considered the introduction of informal rationing. The movement of foodgrains in the districts was facilitated. Railway wagons were commandeered to rush rice from Thanjavur to Madras. Family Ration Cards were issued and the stocks in the city were considerably augmented. These measures eased the situation and averted a crisis. To Kamaraj goes the credit of handling a very bad situation quickly and dexterously thus averting a very serious crisis. This was one more instance of Kamaraj's shrewd perception, quick decision and decisive action. One more feather was added to his cap.

The question of national language, which had been looming large, from time to time, now took a rather aggressive shape. It

became an acute controversy in the non-Hindi areas; especially in Tamil Nadu.

As early as 1957, India's language policy became an acute controversy. The Congress then discussed the question in the party and two formulae were put forward. One was called the three-language formula, by which every child was to learn the regional language or the mother tongue. English and one other modern Indian language — in the case of non-Hindi people it would be Hindi. The other formula was to have English as an associate language, with Hindi for official purposes. As to how long English should continue to remain, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had declared in Parliament that non-Hindi people has to decide how long they would continue English.

The already simmering feelings in Tamil Nadu burst out and students took an active and leading part in the agitation which followed. Kamaraj was away from Madras during the anti-Hindi disturbances. He approved generally the measures taken by the Government to put down violence and damaging public properties. On February 12th the anti-Hindi agitation was called off in response to the appeals from Rajaji, C.N. Annadurai (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam leader) and other prominent persons.

The Jan Sangh in Delhi started an agitation against English-sign boards and even English numerals in car number plates.

The Congress Working Committee which met on January 22nd in Delhi passed a resolution condemning the violent forms of agitation. It appealed to the people of all political and other groups not to continue violence in any form and appealed them to make a determined effort so that the development of the country may not be jeopardised. The Working Committee also strongly urged the Government to put down with a firm hand all forms of violence. The Committee also passed a comprehensive resolution unanimously on the language question, detailing in length the circumstances and manner in which a consensus had been obtained on the language policy. Kamaraj was happy over the resolution.

XIV

THE FINAL DECADE

THE GENERAL ELECTIONS were held in 1967 for the Legislative Assembly. Kamaraj, who also contested was defeated. That was a bad year for the Congress which had to face defeat in many constituencies. Kamaraj continued to be the President of the Congress till the end of 1967. He did not wat to continue indefinitely. So Nijalingappa was elected as President of the Congress. Nesamani, who had been elected to Parliament from the Kanyakumari constituency, died suddenly. Kamaraj was persuaded to contest the bye-election and he was elected to the Lok Sabha in 1969. When the General Elections were held in 1971, he again contested from the same constituency. He was the only Congress-O candidate to be elected to Parliament from Tamil Nadu.

Kamaraj attended the sessions of the Lok Sabha regularly. But he rarely took part in the debates. But he was now a power and force in All-India politics and his opinion and advice were respected. Partymen and non-partymen and leaders of all persuasions used to meet him and discuss with him matters of importance.

Kamaraj had now become a popular national leader and a force to contend and consult with. In his own quiet way he was able to influence and guide his partymen and others who sought his counsel.

In June 1975, Government declared an emergency and brought in an ordinance which gave full power tothe authorities to take summary action.

Kamaraj who had been touring extensively in Tamil Nadu returned to Madras after the first lap of his tour. He wanted to

re-organise and strengthen the Congress-O in Tamil Nadu. He mainly concentrated in the rural areas and wanted to establish close touch with the masses. Wherever he went, there were huge crowds — very often meeting for him for hours together till midnight. He was wanted every where — and if by chance and due to the physical impossibility some places were left out of his tour, people in large numbers assembled on the highways he was passing through and did not allow him to proceed unless he visited their place and addressed the people. After a very strenuous tour, he returned to Madras to have some breathing time before he resumed his tour in other districts. The strain was too much for him and his health broke down. He was advised complete rest for some time by his doctor. Kamaraj was putting up a brave fight against his illness. But destiny and ill-luck conspired to snatch him away too soon. He was basically sick. The end was almost sudden. Though he had been ailing for some time, nobody, not even his doctor, expected it. It was the 2nd October 1975. The city was celebrating Gandhiji's birthday. Kamaraj has as usual, finished his simple lunch, which had now become reduced.

Even though the strong-willed man had been putting up a brave fight with his ailment, at one stage, he became a little depressed. During the last few days he had been expressing his uneasiness.

On 2nd October afternoon at about 3 p.m. he felt some pain in the chest. He began to sweat and had difficulty in breathing. He called Vairavan, his faithful valet and asked him to phone the doctor who was living nearby. The doctor arrived within a few minutes. But before he arrived, the last breath had gone out of Kamaraj.

The news spread like wild fire and milling crowds made their way to his residence at Tirumalai Pillai Road. Fearing unmanageable crowds, the body was taken to Rajaji Hall on Mount Road where it lay in state till the next afternoon. Thousands of people from far and near rushed to have a last glimpse of their beloved leader. Throughout the night and the next day, people surged, and the

Government Estate compound (where Rajaji Hall is situated) was a sea of people. Young and old rushed madly to the place. Many broke down; a popular film star was so oversome that he wept like an orphaned child. An old lady wailed loudly as if she had lost her own son. "Oh en Rajave" (Oh my king) and it was a job to console her.

The mammoth funeral procession started from Rajaji Hall at about 4 p.m. on 3rd October, 1975 and passed through the main roads and the surging crowds swelled on the way. It took nearly three hours for the cortege to cover the five miles from Rajaji Hall to Rajaji Mandapam in Guindy. The place was jampacked and all the leaders and dignitaries, official and non-official, Indian and foreign, converged there to pay their last homage. Srimati Indira Gandhi flew from Delhi and was just in time to pay her homage. She could not contain the tears. The funeral pyre was lit and the flames rose up to the sky amidst wails and sobs and tears. There was a drizzle, as if the Gods were shedding tears. So passed a titan...

He had joined the galaxy of the great ones.

Kamaraj as a man, was a loveable person. He never hurt anybody. He won everybody, even his adversaries, by his kindness and good nature. He rarely lost tempers; but when he did, he was provoked by some unseemly behaviours, or dishonesty. He had no enmity towards anyone, but he could not brook those who acted against the interests of the people and the country. He was a good friend and always tried to help those who were in need of it. It was a personal bereavement for him when his closest friend and mentor, G. Rajagopal (Raju) who was always with him and in whom he had great confidence, passed away prematurely. It was one of the rare occasions when Kamaraj could not contrain his tears. Another very devoted friend was R. Balan, an old Congress worker. He too passed away rather prematurely. He was also a bachelor like Kamaraj and Kamaraj was his idol. This was another rare occasion when Kamaraj shed tears.

His adoration for Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was great. Though he was very often in the opposite camp with Rajaji, politically his personal regard for him was very great. Once, when Kamaraj was Chief Minister, Rajaji, who was addressing a meeting of Tamilians in Bombay had made a remark that Tamilians in Bombay should be happy that they had a better Government (in Bombay), implying that the Government in Tamil Nadu was not good. Somebody took the morning's paper, which had headlined the news and showed it to Kamaraj. Kamaraj simply smiled and said, "I am only sorry what they (in Bombay) would think of him (Rajaji)", typical of Kamaraj.

Sri T.T. Krishnamachari, former Finance Minister in the Central Cabinet was another close friend of Kamaraj. Kamaraj used to spend hours with him and very often sought his counsel. Some close friends of T.T.K. used to meet regularly at T.T.K.'s residence and discuss about men and things. One of them once made some disparaging remarks about Rajaji. Kamaraj got annoyed and asked him not to talk like that.Once he was addressing a small gathering of Khadi enthusiasts and an old Khadi veteran let go some remark, not quite complementary about Rajaji. Kamaraj, who was chairman of the meeting, pulled him up and told him he should not speak like that. Once Rajaji, suddenly visited Kamaraj at his residence to discuss some important matter. Kamaraj became very agitated and said, "Why did you come? If you had called me, I would have come to your house". And he meant it.

From a simple volunteer and worker, Kamaraj rose to the highest position by sheer dint of not only circumstances, but sincere service and sacrifice. His humility, affability, sincerity, integrity of character, selflessness and devotion to the nation were the chief factors that pushed him up the top and earned him well deserved popularity and love from the people.

No wonder this son of the soil became the uncrowned king of the masses.

Blessed is the land that gave such a son.

Epilogue

What is the legacy that Kamaraj had left? What were the lessons to be learnt from his life?

His whose life was one of dedicated service to the country and to the people. Perhaps the one reason why he remained bachelor was that he did not want to shackle himself with bonds of family. The people, especially, the common people, the masses, were his God at whose altar he dedicated his whole life. He was a man of the masses; the people were his kith and kin.

He was moved by the poverty that stalked the land and was always thinking of means and methods to eradicate it. But at the same time he had no hatred of the rich people, or the capitalists. He wanted to utilise them for alleviating poverty and umemployment. Many of the Capitalists and rich people were his friends who were prepared to do anything for him. His ideal was not to rob the rich and make them poor, but make them useful by utilising their wealth for the good of the nation. In this respect he followed Gandhiji. He believed in equality, but this he wanted to accomplish not by levelling down, but levelling up. He did not believe in casteism of any kind. He had no communal feelings and he hated communal hatred. His own trusted friends were Brahmins. He was a staunch advocate of removal of untouchability in any shape or form. To him all men were equal. Of course, he wanted the down-trodden to be uplifted. He wanted that every child should be put to school. That is why he introduced free Primary Education. In his own way, he tried to unify and consolidate and stood against fissiparous tendencies. He was truly one of the foremost Builders of Modern India. His contribution in this respect is outstanding.

K.Kamaraj was foremost among those illustrious sons of India who were instrumental in our National Renaissance and attainment of Independence. It was his political acumen which catapulted him to the post of Congress Party President in the 60's and play an important role in the national politics. Described as kingmaker and one of the greatest political leaders his life was one of dedicated service to the country and to the masses.

The author Shri R. Parthsarathi has put in efforts to bring forth some unknown and sterling qualities of his life and deeds as experienced by him.

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